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Attracting Younger Millennials: Lifting Bond Out of a Transitional Sinkhole

*Yosra Jarrar, Okechukwu Lawrence Emeagwali, Ayodeji O Awobamise **

ABSTRACT

This study critically explores why the four latest installments in the Bond franchise do not resonate well with younger millennial audiences who are poised to constitute a considerable size of movie consumers in the near future. Using an inductive approach, four CinemaSin videos criticizing the four Bond movies under study are analyzed, described and categorized. 10 categorical criticisms alongside four common preferences of millennial movie goers: authenticity, creativity, diversity and ease at which content can be related to, are used to develop six propositions that are associated with a potential to increase the appeal of future Bond movies among younger millennials.

Keywords: Millennials, James Bond, 007, CinemaSin, Millennial Preferences

Introduction

This paper aims at examining the shortcomings of Bond movies from the perspective of millennials and to proffer propositions of how the Bond franchise can better target millennials in future installations. This study logically begins with a brief overview on millennials and how they have recently influenced changes in the movie industry. Next background information on the Bond movie franchise is presented laying emphasis on how the Bond formula has remained relatively unchanged narratively over the years especially in the more recent Daniel Craig Bond movie installations.

Millennials and the Movie Industry

A 2016 report published by Goldman Sachs defines millennials as the largest demographic generation in US history currently ranging from ages (Millennials Infographic). These generation members are currently arriving at their prime earning and expenditure years with significant implications for different sectors of the US and global economies, thus the scramble in the commercial world will better understand them and adequately cater to their needs. In the movie industry the growing influence of this generation has made them of significant importance to film makers, producers, theatre houses, studios and movie advertisers (Understanding Millennial Moviegoers). According to a 2014 Nielsen report, they can be grouped into several groups (Millennials- Breaking the Myths). However, the report noted that irrespective of the different categories within which millennials can be grouped to, one common characteristic they all share is their need for authenticity, creativity, diversity and the ability to relate to content. In other words, studies have shown that their decision to purchase any item (goods or services) like movie entertainment depends on the authenticity of the product or content, how creatively sophisticated it is, the degree of diversity it entails or represents and how relatable it is to their current life experience.

According to a research on movie-going behavior (Understanding Millennial Moviegoers), most millennials prefer the horror movie genre (47% of respondents) followed by urban (23%), young adult comedy (18%) and Tentpoles (13%)

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genres. While this provides a general picture of millennial preferences across genres, it is important to note as clearly stated in the report that these preferences evolve over time across millennial age subgroups.

In a two phased dissertation study about what millennials found to be of the highest importance in movie trailers, Lepore (2014) carried out a focus group, administered questionnaires and carried out in-depth interviews with three notable film experts. Findings from her result showed that the majority of millennials irrespective of their age groups use both movie trailers and critic reviews to make their decision about whether a movie is worth seeing at the theaters or not. Findings also revealed that the storyline (or movie plot) was perceived to be the single most significant factor that motivated them to go see a particular movie. This is followed by the movie cast and cinematography. The author further noted that with regard to the storyline (or plot) millennials appeared to be in favor of those which they could easily relate to. While the focus group revealed that movie trailers which revealed details about the story line provided enough motivational bases for them to see the movie, respondents in the second group which were administered questionnaires however, preferred movie trailers with minimum details of the story line. This second group appears to prefer this kind of movie trailers to the more detailed ones because the mystery and suspense they generate provides the motivational push which drives them to want to see the movie. Irrespective of how detailed the storyline is revealed in a movie trailer, findings from this study shows that storyline creativity and the experience and diversity of the cast are key to holding the interest of millennial movie consumers. Most importantly however, the author notes that ‘over half of participants feel that they can more easily connect with a film trailer if they can personally relate to an aspect of the storyline’ (Lepore, 2014, 17). Another important finding is the fact that the participants unanimously agreed that a ‘cliché or predictable storyline is not favored’ (Lepore, 2014, 17).

The Bond Movie Franchise & Younger Millennials

The lack of a single scholarly or empirical study clearly defining and categorizing the Bond franchise’s target audience can be attributed to the existence of the franchise for over six decades and the consequent transient nature of its target audience across generations. However, despite this paucity of demographic data, a few attempts have been made by several agencies and organizations to provide a general picture of its generic target audience. First and foremost is the 2002 statement by the video rights holder of James Bond movies- Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer Studios Inc., that the franchise’s target audience was primarily made up of men aged 13-59 (People.com). In 2012 however, the Hollywood.com website reported the results of a study it carried out in order to identify the major demographic groups that were fans of James Bond movies. To do this, it analyzed the frequency with which the Bond movie ‘Skyfall’ or its characters were mentioned on Facebook shortly after its release and found that while Skyfall was more popular among men in general, those aged between 25 and 34 made the most frequent mentions than any other male subgroups(Hollywood.com). Another Bond dedicated website the james bond dossier.com, used statistics on visitors to its website to reflect probable Bond target audience in the US. It noted that 79% of all visitors were men and those less than 18 years of age were 13%, while those aged 18 to 24 were 14% (The james bond dossier.com). In contrast, older visitors aged 25-34 were 20%, 35-44 were 24%, 45-54 were 16% and those aged 55-64 were 9% (The james bond dossier.com). Furthermore, considering that corporations seeking product placement opportunities are more often than not motivated to seek product placement when there is an alignment of their target audience and that of a potential movie franchise, it is thus possible to indirectly glean additional demographic data about a franchise from the assessments of corporations it is affiliated to. From the first movie installation of the Bond franchise, the Smirnoff Vodka has been the choice vodka for Bond’s vodka martinis. However, in 2002, the company announced that it would cease placing its products in Bond movies, stating that the franchise’s fan-base –which it described as men aged 25 to 45, were no longer

of interest (People.com). It added that it was seeking a younger and more social consumer segment which it described as those aged between 21 and 29 (People.com). Also a 2015 Bloomberg article quoted the President of Omega-manufacturers of the high end Omega and Swatch wrist-watch brand affiliated to the Bond franchise; as implying that while sales from its Bond franchise themed Omega wrist-watches had helped keep revenues high by attracting older millennial groups, the company was seriously seeking younger clients. He argued that the older millennial population was aging and the future of the organization depended on younger clients (James Bond's Favorite Watch Tackles).

A review of the demographic picture painted by MGM Studios Inc., Hollywood.com, the james bond dossier.com, Smirnoff Vodka Inc. and Omega Inc. reveals that while naturally, the Bond franchise aims at reaching audiences between the age of 13-59 (as revealed by MGM) however, it has only been successful over the years at attracting audiences aged 25-45 and older (as revealed by Hollywood.com, the james bond dossier.com, Smirnoff Vodka and Omega combined). Thus one can logically deduce that the franchise has been lagging behind in attracting younger audiences aged 13-24 (still based on MGM's statement of an original target audience aged 13-59). Upon the above assessment it is safe to say that the Bond franchise has not been very successful at attracting younger millennials. The purpose of this study is thus, to theorize a probable collection of propositions that could lift the Bond franchise out of this sinkhole and make future Bond installations more appealing to younger millennials.

The Bond Movie Franchise & Its Narrative History

James Bond is depicted as a fictional MI6 British spy code-named 007 and who first debuted in Books written by Ian Fleming. Over a period of fifty-three years, Eon productions- producers of the James Bond movies and curators of its franchise have churned out twenty-four James Bond movies in two-year intervals on the average. While the James Bond narrative has been widely received by global audiences for decades with its appeal cutting across multiple generations including the Silent generation, the Baby Boomer generation and generation X, a looming question is the propensity of the franchise to remain relevant in a future where the millennial generation constitutes the most populated global generational group (Fry, 2016). The reason why the relevance of the franchise to this particular generational group is of concern to scholars is the fact that members of this group were born at a time when the world was and is experiencing tremendous technology-driven changes bringing along a high degree of interconnectivity, communication, global interaction and a faster pace of life. These fast-paced changes means that millennials live in a world far different from those their parents were accustomed to. Thus, in order to appeal to this generation (especially its younger subgroups), it is important to re-evaluate and assess previously accepted storyline narratives to better understand how they may need updating to suit the realities of today's world and the preferences of millennials. In this regards, scholars tend to analyze Bond movies from a structuralist perspective focusing on the narrative elements suggested by Prop (1975), Todorov (1977), Barthes (1977) and Levi-Strauss (1972). Their theories have certain characteristics in common; they all try to explain the varying behavior of narrative structures as influenced by the varying cultural settings and often Bond movies more or less remained the same over the past five decades in adhering to the common narrative patterns (in terms of plot, theme, cliché, stereotype, stylistics (Anbar, 2014) suggested by the four theorists.

The Bond Formula

The popularity and continued relevance of Bond films is inextricably linked to a structured pattern of narrative consistently pursued in every installment of the franchise. Consistency as used here does not refer to the religious adherence to a rigid pattern of delivery, but to a rigid knack for maintaining traditional signature elements while adapting to modern societal changes to a certain extent. This tendency to maintain traditional elements has been referred to and promoted as the '007 Formula' by Christopher Linder (2003). A preliminary analysis we conducted revealed the Bond

formula as contained in all four Bond movies under review, conformed (with slightly insignificant variations) to the four narrative perspectives mentioned above. In addition to maintaining this formula, every new bond film is also required to strike a balance by including a substantial degree of variation or newness relevant to the time of release of the installment.

The very success of each new Bond film is dependent on its adaptability to prevailing changes in technology and culture. However, a review of the most recent four Daniel Craig Bond movies reveals that (a) there has been very little consideration for varying the structure and content of the movies (b) most importantly, there appears to be a total lack of consideration of the needs of millennial movie goers (especially younger millennials aged 13-24) and as such these movies have drawn a lot of criticisms from current millennial film critics and scholars. Bearing in mind that as mentioned earlier, most millennials base their choice of movies on the opinion of film critics (Al-Dbyasi& Al-Tahat), this flagrant neglect of millennial movie goers – a demographic group currently of crucial and existential importance to the movie industry as a whole, raises serious questions about the directionality and existential future of the Bond franchise itself. It is thus the aim of this paper to address these concerns by examining the shortcomings of the Bond franchise in appealing to this important demographic group and proffering propositions that would enable future installations better target and appeal to millennials.

Methods

In conducting a study of this nature, one of the issues that first comes to light is that at the literature review phase, there is a dearth of scholarly literature examining the Bond franchise relative to generational groups. However, this study was able to progress using a qualitative methodological approach and relying on secondary data mostly retrieved from the self-published works of prominent film critics, such as (CinemaSins)-whose videos criticizing the four latest bond movies were crucial to our analysis and findings as well as other online based publications duly referenced throughout this text. From a procedural perspective, data collection and analysis was guided by the descriptive theory development process put forward by Carlile and Christensen 2006. This entails a three-stage inductive process beginning with the observation and description of a phenomena, categorization of outcomes of the observation and description, and developing statements of association among categories and outcomes (Carlile & Christensen, 2016). In order to carry out the observation/description and categorization phase of the analysis, we collected and aggregated movie preferences of millennials in general on the one hand, and prominent video criticisms of each of the four James Bond Movies under study primarily from CinemaSins. CinemaSins was chosen because the curators have a high reputation among audiences as evidenced by the over 1 billion (1,368,900,063) views and over 6 million (6,087,190) subscribers to their YouTube channel (as of 16.08.2016). In particular their videos criticizing the four latest James Bond movies have garnered a total of over 10 million (10,343,213) views including 94,923 likes and 5,207 dislikes (as of 16.08.2016).

Upon examining the videos, qualitative content analysis was used to identify and isolate 10 key categorical patterns which emerged (see the analysis section). The coding of individual critical points into the 10 isolated categories was carried out by two independent coders and an inter-coder reliability of 0.86 was obtained, indicating strong reliability among the independent coding of each criticism conducted by each coder. The categories were then used to review the four Bond movies under study and not only were their existence confirmed they also matched the four pivotal movie preferences of the millennial group: authenticity, creativity, diversity and ability to relate with a movie's content. Findings were then used during the final stage of the descriptive theory development process to make propositions for possible enhancement of future bond installations to enable them appeal more to younger millennial groups.

Analysis & Findings

Description of the different categories of criticisms isolated from a review of data and all four movies, their conceptual definitions as well as their frequency of occurrence are first presented below.

(a) The Categories and their Definitions

List of Categorizations Deduced & Operational Definitions

1. Lack of originality: This category aggregates scenes in each Bond movie which bears striking resemblance to another scene in unrelated movies or in previous Bond franchise movies.

2. Mind-numbing non-instant gratifying and time-wasting scenes: Scenes where nothing entertaining or intellectually stimulating occurs for a period of 2-4 minutes and beyond

3. Unintelligently unrealistic scenes: Scenes where illogical actions are taken. This includes oversights and clear situations where Bond or a different character makes outright foolish or stupid moves which although screen friendly appear stupid to the average millennial.

4. Dry humor: An aggregation of scenes where failed attempts at humor are observed.

5. Infallible superhero: Scenes which clearly serve the purpose of preserving Bond's projection as a superhero, for example being hit by a bullet and surviving while other characters inevitably die under the same circumstance.

6. Misrepresentation and inaccurate use of facts: Scenes where actions are taken which negate real facts for example simultaneously shooting at a target with two pistols which is scientifically impossible in real life.

7. Exaggerated sex appeal: The portrayal of James Bond as irresistible and able to attract and bed every woman he interacts with (Abdelazim, 2014).

8. Plot holes: Situations where there are disconnections between scenes. Especially when activities in a previous scene negate those in a current one.

9. Weak attempt at horror scenes: Although sparingly used, horror scenes are poorly projected compared to what is obtainable in the modern movie industry. This category aggregates such scenes.

10. Cliché scenes: Successful but worn out scenes previously used in prior franchise films or in other movies that are repeated in current ones.

(b) The frequency of occurrence of each category

| Categories of Shortcomings of the Four Bond Movies | | Frequency of Occurrence |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| 1. | Lack of originality | 13 |
| 2. | Mind-numbing non-instant gratifying and time-wasting scenes | 4 |
| 3. | Unintelligently unrealistic scenes | 93 |
| 4. | Dry humor | 2 |
| 5. | Infallible superhero | 8 |
| 6. | Misrepresentation and inaccurate use of facts | 4 |
| 7. | Exaggerated sex appeal | 3 |
| 8. | Plot holes | 17 |
| 9. | Weak attempt at horror scenes | 1 |
| 10. | Cliché scenes | 12 |

Concluding Propositions

In light of the 10 categories of criticism isolated above and considering the four earlier indicated preferences of millennials for movie content which are authentic, creative, diverse and can easily be related to, we make the following

propositions for enhancing the appeal of future Bond installations to members of the younger millennial group mostly aged 13-24.

Firstly, in a bid to be more creative, recent bond movies especially the latest installation: Spectre revealed several secrets that once provided the mystery which kept viewers glued to the Bond franchise for decades. For example the provision of extensive backstory about the connection of the villain to previous bond villains and the childhood relationship Bond and the villain shared. There should be a return to heightened levels of the mysterious.

Proposition 1: *Increasing the mysterious content of future Bond installations will have a positive impact on viewership among younger millennials.*

Secondly, the interconnectedness of the last four James Bond movies ironically impedes absolute comprehension of the latest installations in the franchise. This is because a lot of casual film consumers (one of the many characteristics of millennials) may not have seen previous installations, or be motivated to review them, and in the absence of prior knowledge about the recurrent characters in later installations, might find themselves left with comprehension gaps while watching later installations, which might further demotivate consumption of later installations. Thus to further enhance absolute comprehension, stand-alone installations should be the new direction, and even when interconnectivity is necessary especially when trying to birth multiple installations over time, each connected installation should be self-sufficient or whole to a great extent such that the interconnected elements projected to future installations are unable to impede comprehension.

Proposition 2: *Enhancing the individuality of future Bond installments will ease comprehension thus encouraging more viewership by younger millennial audiences.*

Thirdly, the sheer lack of humor or weak attempts at humor expressed in recent installations of the Bond movies while clearly obvious to the average viewer, has been proven to be a deliberate exclusion by the producers. This fact is acknowledged by Daniel Craig himself in a recently granted interview in which he revealed that it followed the immense ridiculing of such humor and light hearted scenes in previous Bond installations by the Austin Powers films (Cinemablend). Nevertheless with a sizable proportion of millennials leaning favorably towards comedy-themed movie offerings, the Bond franchise would do well to re-introduce these scenes if it has any intent on appealing to the future dominating younger millennial audience.

Proposition 3: *Re-introducing the humor content in future Bond installations will have a positive impact on viewership among younger millennials.*

Fourthly, latest James Bond installations (especially the latest 4) are rife with scenes where Bond takes certain actions or scenes are executed in certain ways which are not just unrealistic in the spy business, but are easily recognizable as unrealistic to the lay viewer. Although it expected of most movies with a lead character that they surmount all obstacles they encounter throughout the plot and survive or win at the end of the movie and according to the villain Kamal Khan in the Bond installation 'Octopussy' who described Bond as having "a nasty habit of surviving" (Lidner, 8) early Bond installations were more believable, requiring Bond to rely on just a little luck to persevere or overcome. However, an overview of the four latest installations reveal that today's Bond as portrayed by Daniel Craig appears to be more reckless, careless and needing huge amount of luck for his successful prevalence to be believable. This current approach keeps the notion of Bond as a spy far removed from what spies look like and go through in real life, making the Bond story-line difficult to believe and difficult to relate with in the minds of millennial film consumers. Thus considerable effort is required to make it easy for millennial audiences to believe that Bond is the best Spy there is in the world- an image at the heart of the Bond franchise. Also, action scenes in the latest installations of Bond appear to try to compete with recent

blockbuster movies in the action genre such as the fast and furious which have been extremely successful at the box office. However, this need to compete has led to much more unrealistic action scenes which are not only difficult to believe but do not adequately exhibit the smartness that comes with a reputable spy of Bond's nature. This further buttresses the call for bringing the Bond character closer to the realities of a reputable international spy and further enhancing his appeal to the millennial demographic. Furthermore, with regard to romance or sex in the Bond franchise, a keen observation in all four latest Bond movies is that these scenes have become increasingly unrealistic or outright repugnant. A prominent reason why this appears so is the fact that these four latest installations have tried to portray a grounded version of Bond who is less humor inclined and less of an ardent involved womanizer unlike his predecessors. While it is also very notable that female companions of Bond in these latest installations have been portrayed to reflect recent advances in female independence and the current wave of feminism sweeping across continents, however, the romance scenes still appear unrealistic. A possible theory in this regard might be an underlying struggle to match a masochistic alpha male Bond and an independent feminist female companion. Regardless of what the underlying causes are, the Bond franchise would first of all have to decide if it is necessary to continue portraying romance in future installations and secondly find a way to portray such scenes in a realistic manner if the decision is made to include them in future installations.

Proposition 4: *A more realistic and relatable Bond character and scenes in future installations will have a positive impact on viewership among younger millennials.*

It is also ironic that in an era of interconnectivity and global proliferation of hi-tech innovations, Bond movies are seeing less reliance on technology especially with regard to the use of hi-tech gadgets. Q's innovations used to be an important wow factor audiences expected from each Bond installation in the past. With the current tech savvy nature of millennial film goers who naturally appreciate rare and innovative technology, leading the way in wowing audiences in the tech domain would not only return part of the Bond franchises dissipating glory, but also enable find more appeal with millennials.

Proposition 5: *The inclusion and showcasing of more novel and impressive technological gadgets in future installations will have a positive impact on viewership among younger millennials.*

Perhaps Dr. No – the debut installment of the Bond franchise reflected a hallmark of film creativity in its time. However, the fact that the Bond movie formula has remained more or less the same for the past five decades has meant that the well of creativity might have been overdrawn and the need to reevaluate not only the key elements of each Bond installation, but the James Bond Character itself.

In the first instance an ardent follower or keen observer of all of the Bond installations would easily notice that while each new installation features a new storyline, such storylines often have an overlapping story arch which randomly repeat themselves across installations. Also it can be seen that each installation often features a Bond, a new sports car, a new Bond girl, a new theme song and a new villain among others. While Bond loyalists have come to expect these elements in every Bond installation and perhaps they collectively contribute to the immense success regularly recorded by the franchise at the box office, they may prove inadequate in catching and keeping the attention of millennials in the future. While it should be acknowledged that infusing creativity into a world acclaimed and standardized film offering of this nature can be difficult task entailing the exaggeration of scenes in new installments or squeezing in new elements which may end up becoming incompatible with the Bond brand image. However at the very least, the producers should be inclined to re-evaluate all of these traditional elements that have made the Bond franchise a financial success for the past five decades with the intention of assessing their continued relevance, the impact of their exclusion in future

installments, the impact of an upgrade in the Bond character itself (to reflect modern audience expectations for example diversity) as well as the introduction of novel modern elements which in addition to traditional elements will insure the attraction of the millennial populace who are poised to form the majority generational group in the not too distant future.

Proposition 6: *Enhancing creativity in the content of future Bond installations will captivate and thus encourage more viewership by younger millennial audiences.*

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جذب اهتمام جيل الألفية الأصغر سناً: قراءة انتقالية في أفلام جيمس بوند

ملخص

تطلعت هذه الدراسة لاستكشاف السبب في أن أفلام بوند الأربعة الأخيرة لم تخلف أثراً عميقاً في جمهور الشباب الأصغر سناً الذين يشكلون النسبة العظمى من مشاهدي تلك الأفلام في المستقبل القريب. وقد استعملت الدراسة منهجاً استقرائياً، وتم تحليل أربع مقاربات نقدية نُشرت من خلال الفيديو، وتناولت الأفلام الأربعة قيد الدراسة، من حيث تحليلها ووصفها وتصنيفها. فضلاً عن بلورة عشرة معايير نقدية تقف جنباً إلى جنب مع أربعة مظاهر للمفاضلة طرحها رواد سينما الألفية الجديدة، وهي: الأصالة، والإبداع، والتنوع، والسهولة التي يمكن أن تكون ذات صلة بالمحتوى، وقد استخدمت لتطوير ستة مقترحات ارتبطت بإمكانية زيادة جاذبية أفلام بوند في المستقبل لجيل الألفية الأصغر سناً.

الكلمات الدالة: جيل الألفية، جيمس بوند، 007، سينما، عناصر المفاضلة السينمائية.

* الجامعة الأميركية في قبرص (1، 2)، جامعة كامبالا الدولية (3). الأردن. تاريخ استلام البحث 2017/08/21، وتاريخ قبوله 2018/02/06.